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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the organization, Artists Call, as well as several slides shown during the presentation to illustrate "visual solidarity" between artists of the United States and Central America. In 1983, artists in 27 U.S. cities as well as Paris and Mexico City organized Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America. Numerous exhibitions, film showings, art lectures, and other activities have taken place across the United States from 1983 to the present. The slides shown at the conference were divided into several categories: (1) works by North American artists living in California participating in events organized by Artists Call, and works outside Artists Call; (2) artworks by Central Americans in California; (3) murals by North Americans, Latinos, and Latin Americans in Nicaragua, 1983 through 1987; and (4) Artists Call's massive (10,000) Postcard Exhibition and Mail-In Project of 1985. (SM)

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ART BRIDGING BOUNDARIES:

CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

by

Shifra M. Goldman

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Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies
Tempe, Az.
Latin America: Crisis and Change

Shifra M. Goldman
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ART BRIDGING BOUNDARIES: CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

A large number of North Americans have been kept in ignorance about events in Central America through a blizzard of "disinformation" and downright lies. Some of this was revealed during the course of the recent Iran/Contragate hearings. There is a growing consciousness of why certain North American church members were willing to risk prison sentences to provide sanctuary for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, and why various municipalities have proclaimed themselves "sanctuary cities." The appearance of Salvadoran "death squads" in Los Angeles also points out that the battle for peace, justice and self-determination in Central America is far from won.

In 1983, artists in 27 cities of the United States (as well as Paris and Mexico City) made their opinions known when they organized Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America. Artists Call represents, perhaps, one of the longest-enduring artists groups since the 1960s taking a position, through their art and art activities, on questions of U.S. foreign policy. Numerous exhibitions, film showings, art lectures, and other activities have taken place across the United States from 1983 to the present. The next activities planned in Los Angeles are a juried exhibit called "Artists Recall" to take place November 1987, followed in 1988 by an exhibit of contemporary art from Costa Rica.

Among the many positive "fallouts" of Artists Call nationally has been the increasing contact between North American and Latin American artists, and those few Central Americans who are managing to produce art in spite of the desperate struggle for survival.

In the short time at my disposal, I would like to present as many works of art as possible so as to give an idea of the nature of "visual solidarity." The slides will be divided into several categories:

1. Works by North American artists living in California participating in events organized by Artists Call, and works outside Artists Call.
2. Artworks by Central Americans in California.
3. Murals by North Americans, Latinos, and Latin Americans in Nicaragua, 1983 through 1987.
4. Artists Call's massive (10,000) Postcard Exhibition and Mail-In Project of 1985 (show sample postcard).

SLIDES

Artists Call

Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America (and the Caribbean) began in New York in 1983 (Slide), publicized by this large poster designed by Pop artist Claes Oldenburg in which Central Americans (designed like the famous Iwo Jima group of Keinholz) pull down the "banana republics." The Los Angeles poster (Slide) featuring a peace dove blocking armaments was designed by a Nicaraguan and used by Artists Call in Los Angeles.

In October 1984, Los Angeles Artists Call (AC) carried out a month of activities which raised consciousness about Central America all over California with performances, poetry readings (Slide; Self-Help Graphics), exhibits (Slide; Social and Public Art Resource Center gallery), music (3 Slides; So. Cal. Library gallery), lectures, video showings (600 attended), newspaper ads, and radio programs. The two artists (Slide) Salvadoran Edgar A. and Angeleno Michael Walker became acquainted. Michael Walker's colored pencil drawing (Slide), The Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador was made into a poster in 1984. The original was exhibited with AC. Also shown were Betty Hagen's Flores de vida para Centroamérica (Slide), Arnold Mesches' airplane (Slide), a mixed media piece by the group Mother Art, Flowers for Four Women (Slide) - one of four pieces based on real biographies -, Deborah Small's painted wood piece Sphere of Influence (Slide) referring to the domino theory. Photographers also participated: Fred Lonidier's (Slide) serial images called 29 Arrests, Stefan Merken's (Slide) photograph-with-paint Dachau/El Salvador comparing the German holocaust with the Central American one as articulated by Argentinean/Jewish journalist Jacobo Timmerman, Sheila Pinkel's manipulated photograph of hands and papers on El Salvador.

Independent Works

Outside Artists Call, three Chicana artists have made their statements about Central America: Yreina Cervantez (Slide) in her silkscreen on a Guatemala woman resistance fighter confronting the helicopter with the aid of a rifle and the ancient jaguar, Ester

Hernández (Slide) with a silkscreen titled The Disappeared whose Guatemalan fabric is woven with helicopters, skulls, dead bodies, and stained with blood, and Kay Torres (Slide) whose manipulated photograph with text called Contra/con plays with words and images - from the gray and white fragmented reality of Nicaragua under the Somoza dictatorship to its full color reality today. Lisa Kokin (Slide) is not a Latina, but has created incredible quilted and embroidered batiks taken from photographs: like To the Salvadoran Woman Giving Birth to a New Day, Future (Slide), and the East Market (Slide) which is 5 ft long by 3 ft. high - both about Nicaragua.

Central American Artists in California

Self-taught Edgar A. (Slide), who escaped to California from El Salvador in 1982 after six members of his family were killed and his life threatened, found expression and catharsis in carving and painting wood sculptures about his country and the U.S. This one is The Salvadoran Family and includes paint, photograph, and other items collaged on the surface. His first exhibition of earlier pieces was in 1984 with Artists Call. As the solidarity movement grew, several Salvadoran artists formed an arts group, Los Cipotes (The Kids), which exhibits regularly. A's work Unity (Slide) is still a flat wall piece (most are about 2 ft x 2 ft or higher); however Sanctuary is larger and more three dimensional, with real metal and cloth. He is working on Orphan Child (Slide) which is detachable from the bench. Rafael E., living in sanctuary, came here less than two years ago and is a self-taught painter who made the trip from El Salvador via Mexico (where he

painted murals). He has several styles which are not yet synthesized: Song for the Village (Slide) is a borrowed neo-primitivism popular in El Salvador; Seduction (Slide) shows considerable experimentation with collage, and the concept of consumerism which tempts all who live in the U.S.; Waiting for the Change (Slide) successfully blends his use of photographs with the Salvadoran neo-primitivism used in original ways as symbols. Guatemalan Alvaro A. has been in California five years and is quite sophisticated. He qualifies for amnesty, and works in Los Angeles. His installation La Niña (Slide) combines a fairly realistic painting with an abstract sand "painting" traditional to Antigua where he comes from. The kneeling Indian woman (slide) is an oblique way to comment on the suffering in his country. La Niña (Slide) has also been carried out as a "performance" - a type of visual artist's "theatre" which is not theatre (Slide).

Murals

Texas Chicano Leo Tanguma (Slide) carried out this three dimensional 33 x 45 foot mural called Después de ésta cruz for indoor or outdoor installation in Denver where he now lives. Constructed like a flame, it deals with all peoples of the Americas (Slide), with a central focus (Slide) on Central America.

The group Placa is a multi-ethnic group formed in San Francisco in 1984 to paint murals (Slide). All the following five murals (5 Slides) on Central America are in Balmy Alley in the heart of the Latino Mission district. Miranda Bergman (Slide) and a San Francisco team painted a Children's Library in Nicaragua in 1983 (3 Slides); and returned in 1986 (2-Slides) to paint El Amanecer for ANDEN, the

teachers' association building.

A Los Angeles group of Chicanos(as) called Chica-Nica (Slide), including painters Barbara Carrasco, Kathy Gallegos and Yreina Cervantez (Slide), and Chilean artist-in-exile Francisco Letelier went to Nicaragua in 1986 to paint a mural (Slide) of solidarity, about 14 x 45 feet, showing the struggles of Chicanos in the United States (Slide).

Finally, I just received slides (Slide) of a new mural, Los Prometeos completed this year by Canadian-born Mexican artist Arnold Belkin in the National Palace of Heroes and Martyrs of the Revolution in Managua. This was one of two murals officially sponsored by the Mexican government, and the style is within the tradition of Mexican muralism by a third generation artist (Slide) connected with the Siqueiros trajectory. The mural compares Zapata (Slide) rendered in paint and backed by photographically-derived historical images, with Sandino (Slide) in a similar arrangement.

Postcard Exhibition and Main-In Project: Artists Call, 1985

(Show sample postcard). 10,000 postcards were printed for the "Arms Out" project, and distributed in the pages of Artweek and at galleries and schools all over Los Angeles. Artists were to remove the end piece, do a work of art on the reverse, sign and stamp the card for mailing to Washington, D.C. (non-artists could just sign and mail). 400 cards were juried for exhibition, one which is still travelling. I have slides of five from the 400: Big Lie (Slide) which is done with rubber stamps; Contra Diction/Freedom Fighter (Slide); U.S. (or Us) Arms Out (Slide); Dialogue Not Violence is the Way to

Peace (Slide); and the final one (Slide) which I think expresses cogently the theme of this panel on the popular culture of Central America: the marimba player (culture) confronted by armed aggression.